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Collective view: Squatters huddle around a stove as they take refuge at the former Crookesmoor junior school, Sheffield.

Squatters take refuge in school

CHRISTMAS for dozens of young people in Sheffield has been spent huddled round a stove in a draughty classroom at a disused school in the city.

A group of homeless young people and New Age travellers, together with assorted dogs and a cat, are squatting in the former Crookesmoor junior school.

They have taken refuge in the building and plan to stay there until they are

forced to move on by the authorities.

The Old School Collective, as the squatters call themselves, has pledged to leave it in a better state than it found it. When the squatters arrived, vandals had ripped out toilets, smashed windows and stripped lead from the roof of the school, which closed last summer as part of a city-wide school-closure programme.

The collective has distributed hundreds of leaf-

lets to people explaining its position.

One of the squatters, Dill, 29, said: "It's just to say hello, don't be afraid of us. We may look weird but we're not to be feared."

"A lot of people have been very supportive, including two school governors who came to see what was happening. We're pooling our resources and everyone is helping one another."

The collective wants to turn the former school into a

community centre and about 200 people from all over the country turned up for a weekend conference there on environmental issues and alternative living.

The squatters have ventured out of their refuge to plant two sacks of daffodils and several trees on land near the school.

But Sheffield education authority officials are not so enthusiastic about the occupation of its property, which it was hoping to

auction.

Officials are seeking an injunction to remove the squatters and have contacted police about possible action.

A spokesman said: "Clearly we have some concerns about what is going on, and we've had complaints from some local residents about loud music etc. We're also concerned that they're using a wood-burning stove in there, which we feel could be dangerous."